DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 142 282 PS 009 377

AUTHOR Mueller, Delbert
TITLE Schools Without Failure--British Style and Their Implication to American Education.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Objectives; *Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Integrated Curriculum; Mathematics; *Open Education; Reading; *Scheduling; *Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods; Writing
IDENTIFIERS *England (Leicestershire); Integrated Day

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the general philosophy, programs and schedules of elementary schools in Leicestershire, England, recognized for emphasis on the individual approach to learning in which each child travels at his own level or pace. The teacher's role is to provide opportunities for children to explore and investigate a wide field of interests. Part of the integrated day is devoted to learning the communication skills, reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the remainder of the day is spent investigating a topic or working on a project. The teaching of reading, writing, and maths is discussed in some detail. British schools also include religious training and make extensive use of the local environment for learning experiences. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of what the concerns of education should be. (MS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED142282

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE-BRITISH STYLE
and their implication to American education

Delbert Mueller

Leicestershire, England, has, since the late 1950's, been recognized as a center for innovative education within the elementary school. Several books and numerous articles attest to a philosophy in which individualization is the key word. Growth toward this goal has produced a dynamic school system in search of equilibrium. As one headmaster remarked, "We have gone full circle with innovation and progressiveness, and now are seeking a middle ground." The British Primary Schools, as witnessed by this observer, suggested such a "marriage" between traditional and progressive thinking in education.

Leicestershire schools were often identified as open schools. They were open, but not in the usual American sense of the term. Building designs tended to follow two structural plans. The first was a series of rooms open to and centering upon a work area in which crafts and various kinds of group activities were encouraged. The second was an older structure with self-contained, closed-off rooms. A few recently completed buildings were of a totally open design with no walls between classrooms.

Openness of educational programming was not dictated by building design. All school programs were organized with an emphasis on the individual approach to learning in which each child traveled at his own level or pace. Strict divisions of time were abolished except where it was necessary to timetable use of space for physical education and other special-need activities.

The teacher's role was to provide opportunities to, and structure situations for, exploring and investigating a wide field of interest. Teachers provided free interchange of whole class, small group, and individual activities when it was deemed suitable. At all times, the general aim was to encourage child centered learning. The child was to choose when he worked at some particular aspect of class activity, but not whether he worked. Classrooms were

PS 009377

usually divided into study areas for maths, reading and writing, arts and craft, and topic or project.

British Elementary Schools were divided into two subgroups: Infant School--ages 5-7, and Junior School--ages 8-11. When both age groups were housed under one roof, the term, Primary School, was used.

There was very little teaming--teaming in the American sense. Each teacher was responsible for a group of children--his room of children. He taught the reading, maths, writing, and directed children's projects.

* * *

This observer led a group of students to study the Leicestershire schools on two separate visits. Each time he had opportunity to interview heads and teachers. Since a term closely associated with Leicestershire education was the integrated day, a question asked each head was, "What, in your opinion, is the integrated day?" While each head provided a personalized definition somewhat different from another's, certain common characteristics seemed to stand out. The integrated day was usually defined as utilization of the arts and the communication skills as one pursued an investigation of some relevant topic.

Schools generally observed a schedule in which part of the day (about one half) was devoted to learning the communication skills--reading, writing, and arithmetic-and the remainder of the day was spent investigating some topic or working on a project. Topics or projects (students work individually on a selected topic, larger groups cooperate together on a project) frequently occupied a major portion of the afternoon schedule.

Scheduling of learning experiences was usually structured differently from its American counterpart. The organization might have been typified as

follows. Imagine a class of 24 children with one teacher. The class was divided into four groups, A-D. The academic day was divided into five subject areas: reading, maths, story (creative writing), nature study, and topic. An arrangement of time as shown in figure one demonstrated the students' schedule.

Figure 1

Period of Day	Subject Area: Reading	Math	Story Writing, Nature Study, Topic
1	A	B	C D
2	B	C	D A
3	C	D	A B
4	D	A	B C
5	Topic and Other Activities A B C D		

When using this schedule, the teacher would find himself expending most of his energy and time with one-to-one teaching of reading and math, allowing the remaining students to work independently in other areas by following assignment cards or agreed upon projects or topics. While this schedule might be used to establish a structure for the integrated day, it should not be construed as actually followed in any particular school. In practice, the morning most frequently became that time for teacher-student, one-to-one contact in the communication skills, reading, maths, writing, and the afternoon was divided between topic and other activities.

A junior school teacher employed a schedule which specified assignments

(what to do) but allowed freedom of choice regarding when to do it.

Figure 2

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Maths 5					
English 5					
Topic 5					
Nature St. 2					
Story 1					
Reading 5					
Tables 5					

Numerals indicate number of daily assignments to be completed in one week.

Again, the reader must be warned. No one example could depict all Primary School schedules. Each classroom program was planned differently. Teachers were allowed to create their own timetable and a great variety of schedules and practices were employed.

* * *

Reading was taught by following a one-to-one tutorial teaching scheme. Once children began work in a standard text, reading orally to the teacher became the normal way of measuring progress. These regularly scheduled sessions were the core of a child's reading program. The teacher accepted or rejected the child's attempt at oral reading. If the attempt at reading was

accepted, the student received a new assignment. If the child faltered, he would be instructed to practice the same pages again.

Reception classes (5 year old children) entered school at the beginning of each new term (fall, winter, spring). The reading program began with development of oral language skills. Words were placed about the classroom. Strange symbols took on new meanings: Mum, Dad, shop, loo, plimsoles, house. With the aid of flash cards, posters, and experience charts, a reading vocabulary began to grow. After a base of 15-25 sight words had been memorized, the child was introduced to his first reader. There was greater emphasis on the "look-see" method of reading than on a phonetical approach. De-emphasis on phonics was probably due more to limiation of time, because of a commitment to one-to-one teacher-pupil instruction, than to a philosophical point of view opposed to the formal teaching of decoding skills. A school official reported that children were introduced to beginning consonant sounds early. Beginning blends and diagraphs were taught next. Vowel sounds and other combinations were introduced last.

English children read well. There appeared to be few children with reading problems. Learning seemed to be enhanced by removal of social expectation. A child was under minimal pressure to begin formal reading because he had reached a certain age.

There was almost no competition between students in these schools. Students competed against goals, against themselves, each beginning and progressing at his own rate. Since there was no group instruction for communication skills, no grade level, no imposed rate of learning, and no report card grade to record, the threat of failure was removed. This latter point was a key to much of the Leicestershire schools' success. Methods were not always superior, teachers were not the most highly trained, but children did learn as their

abilities allowed. No one was forced.

* * *

Writing was taught as a companion of reading. Reception class children were observed tracing over letters written by the teacher. Lined paper was not used. Soon children were painting and coloring pictures. The teacher would print a one-line sentence below the picture, and the child would trace over the letters. A further development of "story" called for the teacher to print the sentence on a separate paper and have the child copy the sentence below the picture. Finally, the child wrote his own sentence without having a copy to follow. To assist in this stage, a twenty-six page dictionary was created. Each page was entitled with a letter of the alphabet. When the child could not spell a word, the teacher printed it on the appropriate dictionary page. Further practice in writing was encouraged through the use of activity cards and reports from topics and projects, much as might have happened in an American school.

* * *

Maths was generally introduced to infants through comparing and measuring. A sand box, water table, various containers and measuring sticks, encouraged such investigations. Children's vocabulary began to include the words weight and length. Comparative terms such as heavy and light, long and short, large and small, took on common meaning as children moved toward conservation of measurement. Considerable work was done with attribute blocks in which color, shape, size, and texture were compared and elementary set ideas were formulated. Through the manipulation of physical objects children gained an understanding of numbers. "8" became a property common to many sets and could be demonstrated by using an assortment of materials in a variety of patterns.

Number bonds (adding and subtracting) became meaningful as children described sets by identifying subsets with manipulatives (example: 8=5+3=4+4=

=3+5=2+6=1+7=8). Deines blocks became the vehicle through which children developed an understanding of the concepts base and place value, as well as addition and subtraction of multidigit numbers. Hands on materials were used to introduce multiplication and division facts. Memorization was not neglected but understanding prepared the way for memorization. It was found easier to remember when one understood why it was so.

British teachers seemed to have a clear understanding of how children best learn mathematics. Recognition of Piaget's research of child development was evident in every building. British teachers recognized that an elementary school child progressed from preoperational to concrete operational toward a beginning in the formal operational stage of understanding, and they provided learning experiences appropriate to the child's level of development.

* * *

Part of each week was devoted to religious training, the only required subject in English schools. While its practice varied greatly from school to school, it was usually part of a regularly scheduled group assembly and held in the large activity room. Hymns were sung. A Bible narrative or story with a moral was told and prayers spoken. Even though Britains generally did not participate in Sunday morning public worship, their schools did officially recognize the existence of God.

* * *

The Leicestershire schools tended to make extensive use of the local environment. Many of the projects were investigations of sites within the immediate area and often were initiated by a program on educational television. Frequently, creative writing exercises generated from field investigations or trips to this or that place.

While visiting one school I was fortunate to talk with a teacher about to begin a project with his ten-year-old class. The project, written by the

teacher, had as its title, "Our Church at Barwell." It was an attempt to study community art and history using the church as the vehicle and focus of interest. The church, built 750 years before, could suggest many avenues for investigation. This teacher prepared primary resource materials, classroom activities, and planned field trips to the church, graveyard, and the community. Numbers would be utilized as time lines and scale drawings were prepared. Architecture and building designs were to become part of the study. Miniature churches would be constructed. Stained glass windows would be designed. Furniture would be studied. Church symbols would be examined and banners prepared. Through all this activity, children would be able to use their skills in reading, writing, arithmetic, and art as they investigated their environment. This truly represented an integrated experience.

* * *

Not all that is British is better. Not all that is American is worse.

Competition between students is being eliminated, and cooperation between students is encouraged. This is to be admired.

Rather than classify children as having a high, average, or low ability, each child is considered a unique individual with a variety of talents and limitations. This is praiseworthy.

The communication skills are taught as individual skills, separate from each other. This may be necessary.

Children are taught a Christian morality--an attempt to support education of the <u>whole</u> child.

Communication skills are taught using a one-to-one tutorial method--an inefficient use of teacher time.

The lack of competition between students, while commendable may be responsible for a concern that academic excellence has been diminished. A problem one should investigate.

The process of problem solving, information gathering, sorting, organizing, and presenting facts and concepts as learned under the guise of project or topic has much to offer. The practice of topic or project as part of the curriculum may be worthy of consideration within American schools. We might consider the elimination of science and social studies as separate primary grade subjects and develop a series of activities, which include science and/or social science concerns and require integration of the arts and communication skills.

* * *

Where should the above discussion lead? Is there some wisdom to be gained? Can a point of view be developed that will give direction to American and British education? Perhaps an answer to these three questions will evolve if one more question is asked.

"What, above all else, should be the concern of education?" The answer to this question does not focus on learning reading, writing, addition, or multiplication. It does not center on use of communication skills to solve problems and gather information. It does not dwell on the integrated day, open schools, self-contained classrooms, team teaching, vertical groupings, and the like. The answer focuses on <u>person</u>. The concern of education must center on two aspects of man. Each is related to the other. The first speaks to the humaness of man while the second considers him as part of a larger universe in which he is but one of the many participants.

> The first concern of education should be that of assisting each student to become an individual who, when viewing his image in a mirror, can truthfully state,
>
> "I like myself,
> I like the person I was yesterday,
> I like who I am today,
> I like the individual I will actively seek to become tomorrow;"
>
> and who, when interacting with his neighbor, demonstrates a behavior which proclaims,
>
> "I love you, also!"

The implications of this declaration are many. It assumes certain cognitive attainment on the part of the individual as prerequisite to "I like myself." It assumes certain spiritual relationships as prerequisite to "I love you, also."

The child described above will probably read well, be able to work with numbers, express himself in written and oral language, have some knowledge of geography, history, and be scientifically literate. But the learning of these skills and knowledge is complementary to the first goal of education--to help the child become someone who can like himself and others. Therefore, the teaching of reading must strengthen, not weaken achievement toward this central goal. Mathematics, as experienced by the child, must lend support to a condition which raises self image and encourages cooperation. All school activities should focus on this major purpose of education.

Our home, earth, is a system made up of many interdependent factors - animals, plants, and the numerous non-living ingredients such as air, water, and minerals. Man is a part of this ecosystem - not apart from it. Not only must he learn to individually live in harmony with it, but he must develop the skills and knowledge which will allow all men to share in this limited environment with its limited resources.

> Therefore, the second major concern of education should be that of assisting each student to become a contributing member of a global, social and ecological community.

This second statement assumes attainment of attitudes and their supporting competencies which will allow successful interaction within the social-biological world community. The child described above will develop certain minimal competence in communication skills and their application to investigation of his environment. The attainment of these skills and knowledge is not an end in itself. It is supportive to the second goal of education--building toward global social and ecological community.

The school environment must provide a setting which leads the child toward an acceptance of world citizenship in which social justice becomes its hallmark. The school curriculum should encourage attitudes and instruct in knowledge which support a concept of our earth as a closed biological system with limited resources. All school activities should relate to this second purpose of education.

* * *

Against these two criteria teachers can measure their work. They can determine if their efforts are supportive, neutral, or actually detract from their ultimate aims.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Mueller is presently a professor of education at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota. He served as a principal and teacher in Lutheran Elementary Schools for many years. Previous to coming to St. Peter, Dr. Mueller taught at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Dr. Mueller teaches Elementary Education Methods and is active as a supervisor of student teachers.

Dr. Mueller led a group of students and teachers on a study of the British Primary Schools of Leicestershire, England during 1974 and 1975. During each of these four week visits Dr. Mueller had opportunity to visit a number of schools, observing classes and interviewing teachers and heads.